

Undergraduates' Attitudes toward the Use of Facebook in Fundamental English Course

Piyada Low and Rinda Warawudhi

Abstract—English instructors in tertiary level in Thailand usually encounter with large classes with mixed-ability students in their classroom. Time constraints in the classroom also limit the activities to provide an opportunity for students to practice their lessons. Therefore, this paper attempts to investigate the use of Facebook as a learning tool outside the classroom for English classes. The subjects were 158 undergraduate students studying Foundation English I which is a compulsory general course for undergraduates at Kasetsart University Si Racha Campus in Chon Buri province, Thailand. The subjects were divided into two groups: 78 students majoring in engineering were in Group 1 and 80 students majoring in economics were in Group 2. The experiment started after formative test and it lasted seven weeks. Teachers posted questions twice a week and students allowed two weeks to do exercises. At the end of the courses, close-ended and open-ended questionnaires were distributed to students. The results showed that Facebook may be used as a learning tool outside English classroom. It could help promote motivation and attitudes to learn English as well as it can encourage the interaction between teachers and students.

Index Terms—English as a foreign language (EFL), Facebook and fundamental English, social network.

I. INTRODUCTION

Language teachers, especially at university level, have encountered large classes with mixed-ability students and classroom management in Thailand. These difficulties influence both language learning and teaching [1]. To cope with these problems, the teachers sometimes introduce out-of-class activities or e-learning exercises to provide opportunities for students to practice English skills.

In addition, the use of social network spreads widely among the university students currently. Social networking engages people in social interaction and communication [2]. In fact, social networking technology is not only used for personal contact, but it can also be used for business and education purposes [3]. According to National Statistics Office in 2013 [4], the use of computer, Internet, and mobile phone of Thai residents continuously increases every year. In addition, the group of teenagers and young adults whose ages were between 19-24 years was the highest group to use the Internet in Thailand. 58.6 percent of the whole population explored Social Network (Facebook, Twitter, Hi5, GooglePlus) and 46.7 of all Thai residents used the Internet at

education institutes.

Moreover, of all the social networking applications, Facebook was the most popular in Thailand or 28 million users in 2014 whereas the second rank was Twitter with 4.5 million users and the third rank was Instagram with the users of 1.7 million users [5]. Nevertheless, the purposes to use Facebook of the undergraduates in Thailand were for relaxation from loneliness, being socialized in groups, playing games, exposing oneself, curiosity about other's life, and being in trend [6]. Facebook allows users to create their own groups to share information, discuss on the particular topics, hence, it can be used as an online classroom [7]. There are the suggestions from several research articles that Facebook can promote students competency as well as motivation in studying in such academic subjects [8]-[12]. Table I has summarized the use of Facebook in language classroom.

TABLE I: LANGUAGE TEACHING USING FACEBOOK

Author(s)	Course	Results
Haverbacks (2009) [13]	English Reading	Facebook can motivate the participation and can provide students with learning opportunity.
Mills (2009) [14]	French	Facebook enhanced communication, interaction and discussions in French. Students were able to meet the grammatical, functional and linguistic objectives of the French course
Sangsawang (2011) [7]	English foundation	The student's achievement did not meet criteria. However, students reported that they had positive attitudes toward learner autonomy as well as their English course which Facebook was used as the learning tool.
Shih (2011) [15]	English writing	Student's writing skills improved and they had the positive attitudes and motivation to participate in the class.
Suthiwartnarueput & Wasanasomsithi (2012) [16]	English grammar and writing	Students' English grammar was improved and they had the positive attitudes toward Facebook as the language learning tool.

It seems that Facebook can be implemented as a language learning tool; however, there were some research papers reporting the negative results. For instance, Kirschner & Karpinski [17] reported the negative impact when students used Facebook for academic purposes. Students seemed to be distracted by the use of Facebook on other purposes.

In addition, Junco & Cotten [18] investigated the

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relationship between time spent on Facebook and overall GPA and found that they correlated negatively.

Nevertheless, there were no studies on the use of Facebook in large-sized fundamental English classes at tertiary level. The class size of Foundation English I course is about 70-90 students. The course was designed to enhance four basic English skills; however, the emphasis is on English grammar and vocabulary. The course is a three-hour class and meets only once a week for 15 weeks. With the mentioned class size, the researchers, therefore, are interested in providing more opportunities for the students to practice their English skills outside the classroom, especially on English grammar and vocabulary. Facebook, therefore, seems to be an alternative solution in teaching large class with mixed-ability students.

II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study investigates the use of Facebook as a learning tool outside classroom. Three research questions were addressed in the following:

- 1) What are the undergraduates' attitudes toward Facebook?
- 2) What are the undergraduates' attitudes toward learning outside classroom?
- 3) What are the undergraduates' attitudes toward the Facebook as a language learning tool in Foundation English I course?
- 4) Can Facebook help improve students' achievement in English foundation course?

III. METHODOLOGY

This section provides the methodology of this action research that can be divided into four parts:

A. Subjects

This study was conducted after the midterm examination in the first semester of the academic year 2014 which lasted approximately seven weeks. The subjects were 158 undergraduates studying Foundation English I (subject code: 01355111), which is a compulsory general course for undergraduates at Kasetsart University Si Racha Campus, Thailand. The subjects were divided into two groups: 78 students majoring in engineering in Group 1 and 80 students majoring in economics in Group 2.

B. Instruments

There were three instruments utilized in this study as follows:

- 1) *Facebook*: The most popular social networking site. Founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, the site is free to members. Facebook offers instant messaging and photo sharing. The Timeline (new format) or Wall (old format) is the area on Facebook where members post comments and their current status and location as well as upload photos and videos [19].

Group in Facebook is also the option which educators use to communicate and provide out-of-class activities for learners [7], [13]-[16]. In this study, Facebook groups were used as the channels to offer extra exercises for students to do in their free times. Students could also communicate with the

teachers when they did have the questions about their lessons. In addition, teachers shared and suggested the good websites for learning English via the 'status'.

- 2) *Questionnaire*: Questionnaire in this study can be divided into two parts: *Part One* included 21 five scale statements for the students to rate their attitudes toward Facebook, learning outside classroom and the use of Facebook as a learning tool in their fundamental English classes. *Part Two* consisted of five open-ended or written questions attempting to evaluate students' attitudes toward Facebook and the use of Facebook as the learning tool for their English classes as well. The questionnaires were distributed to the students to administer at the end of the course.
- 3) *Scores from formative test and summative test*: These tests were administered to all students registering for Foundation English I course. Formative test or the midterm examination of the course was done prior to this action research while the summative test or the final examination was conducted later. Scores of the both tests were in percentages and were used to compare the achievement of the students.

C. Data Collection

The experiment started after students had midterm examination or formative test. Teachers created two groups: Group 1 for 78 engineering students and Group 2 for 80 economics students. The experiment lasted seven weeks (25 October - 6 December, 2014) and covered the last three units of the course. Teachers posted three questions at a time and lasted for two weeks for each unit. Grammar questions were posted on Mondays and vocabulary questions were on Fridays. Teachers also posted and shared English language learning Facebook pages and websites every week. At the end of last classes (Week 15), questionnaires were distributed to students to express their attitudes toward the use of Facebook as a learning tool in their classes.

D. Data Analysis

The returned questionnaires were analyzed according to means and S.D. The data obtained from *Part One* of questionnaire were interpreted according to the following levels:

- Strongly disagree (the lowest) = 1.00-1.80
- Disagree (low) = 1.81-2.60
- Moderate (medium) = 2.61-3.40
- Agree (high) = 3.41-4.20
- Strongly agree (the highest) = 4.21-5.00

The responses in *Part Two* were analyzed to evaluate whether they were positive or negative attitudes toward Facebook and the use of Facebook as the learning tool in their English classes.

IV. RESULTS

The results are shown according to the three research questions.

- 1) What are the undergraduates' attitudes toward Facebook?
 - To investigate students' attitudes toward Facebook, six statements with 1-to-5 rating scale were distributed to

students and the statements were:

S1: Facebook is easy and convenient to do exercise.

S2: Doing quizzes on Facebook is easy when you use a smart phone.

S3: You like sending and getting feedback.

S4: You are satisfied in joining the studying group on Facebook.

S5: You are satisfied in getting a notification when there is a post or else in the group.

S6: Facebook is suitable for a learning media.

Findings of the two groups on their attitudes toward Facebook are shown in Table II.

TABLE II: STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD FACEBOOK

	Group 1			Group 2		
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
S1	78	4.09	.793	80	4.24	.716
S2	78	4.10	.749	80	4.19	.677
S3	77	3.87	.848	80	3.96	.787
S4	78	4.17	.692	80	4.16	.645
S5	78	3.87	.843	80	4.06	.603
S6	78	3.83	.763	79	4.01	.742

The results from Group 1 reveal that the means of all six statements are at the high level. S4 obtains the highest mean whilst S3 has the lowest mean. In addition, the study on Group 2 shows that the mean of S1 is at the highest or 4.24 whereas the means from S2 to S6 are at the high level. Interestingly, the lowest means of two groups are from the same statement (S3).

There was one open-ended question in *Part Two* asking students about their attitudes toward Facebook. It was:

Q1: Do you think Facebook is an appropriate program for learning outside the classroom? How is it?

It was found that fifty-seven students in Group 1 agreed on the appropriateness of Facebook in learning. The reasons are also the convenience of the application, the easy access, and the rapidity of the application. Eight students (student numbers 1, 7, 41, 46, 48, 55, 65, and 70) also said they were on Facebook via their smart phones regularly.

The analysis also shows that fifty-eight students in Group 2 agree on using Facebook for learning outside the classroom with the same reasons that it is convenient, easy accessed and fast. They can use Facebook application anywhere and anytime. Eight students (student numbers 6, 7, 9, 10, 29, 35, 58, and 70) mentioned that they kept logging in on Facebook regularly on their smart phones. Facebook application is available and mobile friendly on smart phones. Smart phones are what people are carrying in daily lives [20].

What are the undergraduates' attitudes toward learning outside classroom?

2) Seven statements were to be rated for the attitudes toward learning outside classroom. They were:

S7: Outside classroom activities are the key activities to learn English better.

S8: Quizzes on Facebook match to the lessons in classes.

S9: Doing quizzes outside classroom via Facebook can help understand the lessons.

S10: Learning activities on Facebook allow you to participate the lessons all the time.

S11: You are glad to do learning activities on Facebook.

S12: Joining Facebook group is suited for autonomous learning outside the classroom.

S13: Joining Facebook group allows you to communicate promptly to the teachers whenever you have questions.

The responses from the two groups of students can be reported in Table III.

TABLE III: STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD LEARNING OUTSIDE CLASSROOM

	Group 1			Group 2		
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
S7	78	4.00	.739	80	4.05	.745
S8	78	4.10	.656	80	4.26	.651
S9	78	3.83	.780	80	3.99	.720
S10	76	3.96	.682	77	4.04	.677
S11	76	3.97	.730	77	4.08	.739
S12	76	4.01	.683	77	4.10	.699
S13	75	4.04	.779	77	4.09	.764

It can be seen that all seven statements obtain the means at high level and the means of S9 from only Group 2 is at the highest (= 4.26). In fact, the highest means from the two groups (=4.10 and 4.26, respectively) are from similar statement (S8) as well as the lowest means are from the same statement (S9) (=3.83 and 3.99, respectively).

There was one open-ended question in *Part Two* asking students about their attitudes toward online quizzes and other out-of-class activities. It was:

Q2: Do you think quizzes and activities outside the classroom help you have more understanding in English language?

It was found that the majority of students in Group 1 (50 students) perceived quizzes and activities help in learning English. Quizzes and activities make them search for answers and explanation on English grammar (student numbers 10, 26, and 65). However, six students mentioned that quizzes and activities can help in some parts but not much (student numbers 3, 7, 11, 15, 43, and 57).

In fact, more than half of the students (48 students) in Group 2 also agreed that quizzes and extra activities increased their curiosities and interests in English language. A student (number 29) mentioned that Facebook notifications of the new question post encouraged him/her to find the answers to those questions. The students (number 57, 58, 60, 61, 63) spent times in searching for the answers and reading more on English grammar. The activities were ways to review and revise the lessons outside classrooms, and to gain more understanding on English grammar (mentioned by student numbers 20, 62, and 71). The other positive point was that they could do the activities with friends (mentioned by student number 18). Three students said that quizzes and activities were useful but still some parts that are not clear for them (student numbers 64, 70, and 77).

3) What are the undergraduates' attitudes toward the Facebook as a language learning tool in Foundation

English I course?

Eight five point scale statements were for the students to rate their attitudes toward the Facebook as a language learning tool. The statements were:

S14: Joining Facebook Group motivates you to study by yourself.

S15: Joining Facebook Group motivates you to learn English.

S16: Facebook is useful for learning English.

S17: You have learned and corrected your English mistakes after joining Facebook Group.

S18: Activities on Facebook help you interact with teacher outside the classroom.

S19: Activities on Facebook help you interact with classmates outside the classroom.

S20: Activities on Facebook help you perform better in class.

S21: Activities on Facebook encourage sharing information and knowledge.

The findings on the responses from the students in this part can be shown in Table IV.

TABLE IV: STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD FACEBOOK AS LANGUAGE LEARNING TOOL

	Group 1			Group 2		
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
S14	76	3.79	.771	77	3.84	.727
S15	76	3.71	.689	77	3.86	.720
S16	76	4.01	.739	76	4.00	.783
S17	76	3.72	.723	77	3.92	.774
S18	76	3.78	.793	76	3.86	.761
S19	76	3.79	.771	77	3.83	.818
S20	76	3.70	.674	77	3.83	.696
S21	76	4.03	.692	76	4.11	.704

From the table, it can be concluded that the majority of the students agreed on the use of Facebook as a learning tool. The means of S14-S21 could be interpreted that they agreed with the high level. S21 from both Group 1 and Group 2 obtained the highest means (=4.03 and 4, 11, respectively) as well as S20 from both groups also earned the lowest means (=3.70 and 3.83, respectively).

Moreover, there were three open-ended questions concerning Facebook as a learning tool. The questions were:

Q3: What do you think about learning English as a member in the Facebook group?

Q4: Do you think Facebook create better relationship between the teachers and you?

Q5: What would you like to recommend on using Facebook in Fundamental English course?

The findings from these three questions can be summarized as follows:

The results of Q3 showed that thirty students in Group 1 perceived that being Facebook members help them learn more of English grammar via the activities of the group. Facebook group is also enjoyable and the links provided in the group

help in learning English (mentioned by 17 students). In order to get the answers and information from learning activities in the group, they in return kept on actively searching on their own willing. However, there are six students have neutral feelings toward English activities in the group (student numbers; 16, 19, 28, 36, 46, and 52).

In addition, forty-two students from Group 2 have positive feelings towards the activity as it is another way of contacting outside classrooms. The rule that there were only three questions at a time made them comfortable to answer as they said that the questions were not many and they had time to figure out the answers. They could find more information on the internet (student numbers 3, 8, 14, 48, and 56). Dues of answers to questions also make grown their responsibilities and curiosities. It is another way to encourage their self-learning. Recommended websites on the posts help them gain more English knowledge and understanding. Some students said that they were waiting for the answers and new questions (student numbers 6, 16, 18, 25, 32, 60)

The answers from Q4 can be summed up that fifty-one students from Group 1 said that they had better relationship with the teacher. They can ask questions directly to the teacher outside classroom and can ask for the explanation of the answers (mentioned by 15 students). On the contrary, seven students in the group see that Facebook does not have any effect on the relationship with the teacher.

TABLE V: STUDENTS' SCORES ON FORMATIVE TEST AND ON SUMMATIVE TEST

	Group 1		Group 2	
	No. of Students	%	No. of Students	%
Higher	26	33.33%	68	85%
Equal or Lower	52	66.67%	12	15%
total	78	100%	80	100%

Furthermore, forty-four students from Group 2 agreed that Facebook can help in creating better relationship with the teachers. They are at ease in asking more questions. Facebook application is convenient and easy accessed so they can ask anything by sending messages to the teachers. They can ask any questions that come to mind instantly which is a good point for them as they said they did not have to wait until meeting the teacher in class (mentioned by 17 students). For four students (54, 69, 70 and 71), however, Facebook does not have any effect on the relationship with the teacher.

Lastly, students from Group 1 had recommended on the use of Facebook in class in Q5 that a student requested for a question daily and posts of new question pinned to be noticed easily (number 21). Student number 57 suggested that extra class schedules should be posted in the Facebook group. Facebook activities are warmly welcomed by the students. They like to be contacted through the social network. Also, more questions are requested by students in Group 2 (numbers 8 and 62). Video clips on English conversation are suggested by student number 57. Listening activities are also recommended for additional activity by student number 70.

4) Can Facebook help improve students' achievement in English foundation course?

To investigate whether Facebook can help increase students' achievement in their English classes, scores from formative test and summative test were compared as can be seen in Table V.

Only 33.33% or 26 students from Group 1 earned higher scores in their summative test whilst 85% or 68 students from Group 2 could increase their scores in summative test. In addition, scores of 52 students or 66.67% from Group 1 stayed the same or were lower than scores in formative tests, however, scores of only 15% or 12 students in Group 2 were lower and similar to their scores in formative tests.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

It is obvious that Facebook program is accepted as an appropriate program for learning outside the classrooms as it is available on smart phones and can be kept logging in all the time. Quizzes and outside activities can help students have more understanding in English language. Students have to search for the correct answers; and by this way, they have gained more understanding in English grammar. Moreover, learning activities in Facebook groups were perceived positively from the students. For them, Facebook program is enjoyable and easy accessed. Students were satisfied in using and learning from the program. Facebook is also a convenient program for them to communicate with their teachers outside classrooms. The majority of students in both groups have positive attitudes toward the use of Facebook though some students (11 students) see that Facebook does not have any effect on the relationship with the teachers.

However, the results on students' achievement from both groups were not in the same direction. Not many students in Group 1 performed better (26 out of 78) after the use of Facebook on their summative test whereas the majority of students in Group 2 could earn higher scores (68 out of 80) on the test. These findings reveal that there should be a deep study on students' majors and/or other factors that might affect their study in English classes.

In conclusion, Facebook can encourage the students' motivation and attitudes towards learning English, and also increase interaction between teachers and students. Students reported more interaction among them concerning out-of-class activities. It might be a possible learning tool in a large class with mixed-ability students. Teachers can provide out-of-class quizzes and activities to engage students' in their English classes. Factors that might influence the study were: 1) students with no interest in using Facebook; 2) students' unfamiliarity with the group function of Facebook; 3) the objectives to learn English in their classes and; 4) students' majors and their faculties. Students who were not interested in getting connected on Facebook found these out-of-class activities annoying. Students, who perceived these English classes as a compulsory course of the university, copied answers from the fellow students who made the prior comments without any thinking or looking for the correct answers for the exercises. Facebook itself can also cause a problem. Some students could not find the exercises even though they received the notifications from the group. The study on the students' achievement showed that there should be a study in students' majors and faculties as they might be crucial factors influencing their interests on technology.

However, the findings of this study suggest that Facebook can be used as a learning tool in English classes. The researchers, therefore, intend to further investigate on the use of Facebook with other language skills.

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